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emerged as a baby at the outset of the story—that gray mist so pregnant with poetry and romance, and which the graceful verses which head each chapter of the book so happily describe as “God’s veil of mystery.”

EX-ATTACHE.

“LAFCADIO HEARN.”*

THERE could scarcely be found a figure of Lafcadio Hearn’s distinction and literary allurements who should be at the same time as well calculated to baffle a biographer. He lived always an alien among aliens. There is little obvious relation between the different periods of his lonely life. He formed strong attachments which in almost every case his curious sensitiveness led him to shatter. A nature to whom self-revelation was not only uncongenial but impossible, he must have preserved an almost complete spiritual isolation. To reconstruct such a life and personality as this is the business of a seer. And it is a task that Mrs. Wetmore has cautiously—avoided.

With less scrupulousness, the biographer might have allowed her imagination to fuse together the fragments at hand and presented a complete hypothetical picture. With less discretion, she might have admitted, as is intimated in the preface, trivial facts which would have made Hearn seem more human without making him seem more admirable. Hampered, therefore, by her virtues, the virtues of friendship, she has done little more than present an outline of her subject’s life. Of the thousand pages that the two large volumes contain, only 160 are given to the “Life.” Therefore the work might have been more appropriately called the “Letters,” merely, of Lafcadio Hearn. It is in these that the significance of the publication mainly consists, and it is among them that the reader must look to satisfy that curiosity as to the man’s inner image that an artist’s work legitimately arouses. Mrs. Wetmore herself says that the abundance of the epistolary material has obliged her to “abandon all temptation to dwell upon his more human side, his humor, tenderness, sympathy, eccentricity and the thousand queer, charming qualities that made up his many-faceted nature.” That one has omitted, merely for lack of space, all that distinguishes a biography from an encyclopædic summary will perhaps be considered an extraordinary

* “The Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn.” 2 volumes. By Elizabeth Bisland. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

statement. A large part of the slender "Life" is made up of charming, reticent autobiographical fragments left among Lafcadio Hearn's papers. Such color as the biography contains, however, is supplied, not by these pale, mystical reminiscences of Hearn himself, but by the wonderful narrative which his Japanese widow sent to his biographer, and which, or sections of which, Mrs. Wetmore has had the inspired judgment to present unedited. These passages are the intimate expression of one who has first exquisitely felt. They have the art and the artlessness of poetry. Hearn himself would have been ravished by their astonishing but apparently spontaneous felicity of phrase. This is Mrs. Hearn's manner of telling an anecdote:

"Now about this cat: while we lived near the lake, when the spring was yet cold, as I sat watching from the veranda the evening shadow falling upon the lake one day, I found a group of boys trying to drown a small cat near our house. I asked the boys and took it home. 'Oh pity! Cruel boys!' Hearn said, and took that all-wet, shivering creature into his own bosom (underneath the cloth) and kindly warmed it. This strongly impressed me with his deep sincerity which I ever after witnessed at various occasions. Such conduct would be very extreme, but he had such an intensity in his character."

"He was a man with a rare sensibility of feeling," she writes of her husband, "also he had a peculiar taste. Having been teased by the hard world, and being still in the vigor of his life, he often seemed to be indignant with the world. (This turned in his later years into a melancholic temperament.)" And she relates:

"When at Kumamoto we two often went for a walk in the nighttime. On the first walk at Kumamoto I was led to a graveyard, for on the previous day he said: 'I have found a pleasant place. Let us go there to-morrow night.' Through a dark path I was led on, until we came up a hill, where were many tombs. Dreary place it was! He said: 'Listen and hear the voices of frogs.'"

"Indeed, sometimes I thought he was mad, because he seemed too frequently he saw things that were not, and heard things that were not," she says, with beautiful simplicity; and thus tells how she herself supplied the material for some of her husband's ghostly studies:

"He put too much importance to Beauty or Nicety perhaps. He was too enthusiastic for beauty, for which he wept, and for which he rejoiced, and for which he was angry. This made him shun social intercourse; this made him as if he were an eccentric person. To him medi-

tating and writing were the sole pleasure of life, and for this he disposed of all things else. . . .

"I used to tell him ghost-stories in dreary evenings, with the lamp purposely dimly lighted. He seemed always to listen as if he were withholding breath for fear. His manner, so eagerly attentive and looking fearful, made me tell the story with more emphasis. Our house was, as it were, a ghost-house on those times; I began to be haunted with fearful dreams in the night. I told him about that and he said we would stop ghost-stories for some time.

"When I tell him stories I always told him at first the mere skeleton of the story. If it is interesting, he puts it down in his note-book and makes me repeat and repeat several times.

"And when the story is interesting, he instantly becomes exceedingly serious; the color of his face changes; his eyes wear the look of fearful enthusiasm."

Which is, of course, biography of the most enthralling order.

An estimate of the "Letters" is perhaps the part of the psychologist rather than of the reviewer. They are not familiar letters. Not one of them paints the man himself as startlingly as a single sentence of his foreign wife's irresistible eloquence. But of the artist they give a fairly complete and a really absorbing history. It is important that every word of them confirms his wife's testimony of Hearn's "deep sincerity"; he was incapable of pose. His temperament was so far removed from that of the egoist that not under the most fortunate circumstances could he conceivably have been other than modest and fastidiously self-critical. But it is pitiful to read that a man of such rare and positive gifts should have had, to the very end of his life, such an embittering fight for subsistence, so little of that soothing balm of success with which hundreds of lesser authors were busily anointing themselves. His lack of egoism, however, made it possible for him to have a keen and tender understanding of other men. It is subtly evident, in each of his letters to his friends, that he was addressing himself to a human being that he definitely and sympathetically understood; it was not his practice to write down a graceful expression of a mood and address the envelope at random,—a selflessness, of course, rare in correspondence of so high a literary order.

During many years, beginning with the time that Hearn left reporting in Cincinnati to live in New Orleans, he wrote constantly and copiously to H. E. Krehbiel, then also beginning his career. These very winning letters are of singular value in de-

picting, without vanity or self-consciousness, a writer's intellectual youth. Both the divine unrest and the eager industry of the genuine artist are wonderfully set down in them. In a sense Hearn was chiefly, as he said of himself, a "word-artist." And it is certainly true that he was not, as Mrs. Wetmore claims for him, a "great man." He was never an originator or creator, and if there be a class of men to be contemptuously dismissed as "stylists," he probably belongs to it. But what genius he had lay in his poetic sensibility; it was his distinction that, as he said of the Japanese, he "saw the world beautifully," and told, with peculiar magic, what he saw. He cared devoutly for the phrase because he could not endure that it should not suit its content. In his youthful period he wrote: "I shall always be more or less Arabesque—covering my whole edifice with intricate designs, serrating my arches, and engraving mysticisms above the portals. . . . I shall try to be at once voluptuous and elegant, like a colonnade in the mosque of Cordova."

The letters that make up the second volume cover the last fifteen years of Hearn's life, spent in Japan. Of the development of his thought during part of this period the letters to Professor Basil Chamberlain give a singularly interesting history; interesting if they merely served to relate the sudden and extraordinary influence of Herbert Spencer upon a mind up to that time almost exclusively prepossessed by the fantastic and strange. Of supreme interest, because of his extraordinarily delicate sensibility, are his personal impressions of Japan, to which his marriage with a young samurai lady and the establishment of a household containing all her near relatives, intimately introduced him. Quite unconsciously, his letters show the tenderness with which the harassed man fulfilled these heavy domestic responsibilities, which he appears to have accepted fully in the Oriental spirit. The strongest personal emotion ever manifested in the correspondence is that aroused by the birth of his first son, Kazuo, who was always afterward a passion and a feverish anxiety.

Toward Japanese women, "in whom all the possibilities of the race for goodness seem to be concentrated," Hearn's admiring attitude seems to have remained constant. But his feeling, doubtless slightly influenced by his conviction that Japan "despitefully used him," altered radically toward the country itself and toward

Japanese men. In 1890 he wrote to Mrs. Wetmore: "I feel indescribably toward Japan. . . . What I love in Japan is the Japanese. . . . There is nothing in the world approaching the naïve natural charm of them. . . . We are the barbarians! I do not merely *think* these things; I am as sure of them as death." Five years later he said: "You can't imagine my feeling of reaction in the matter of Japanese psychology. It seems as if everything had quite suddenly become clear to me, and utterly void of emotional interest: a race primitive as the Etruscan before Rome was, or more so, adopting the practices of a larger civilization under compulsion—five thousand years at least emotionally behind us—yet able to suggest to us the existence of feelings and ideals which do not exist but are simulated by something infinitely simpler." And, at the same period: "I feel unhappy at being in the company of a cultivated Japanese for more than an hour at a time. After the first charm of formality is over, the man becomes ice—or else suddenly drifts away from you into his own world, far from ours as the star Rephan."

These volumes are indeed the story of a man "teased by the hard world."

OLIVIA HOWARD DUNBAR.

GEORGE SYLVESTER VIERECK.*

IF "A Game at Love and Other Plays" were all that Mr. Viereck had to his credit, it would hardly seem necessary to write about him in these pages; for these little plays, cynically catching life at some unnatural angle, as they do, and cleverly, even brilliantly, done as they are, scarcely amount to a *raison d'être*. If one did not see the poet through the plays, and know something of Mr. Viereck's other work and his acknowledged remarkable gifts, we should dismiss these plays as little more than smart pathological charades. For, indeed, they are little else; and, whatever the irony or other philosophy, of the situations—Mr. Viereck, with all his precocity, seems hardly aware how long we have been accustomed to such irony and such philosophy, even unto the sickness of death—we should pay no attention to them were it not for the unmistakable presence of an original mind, and an exceptionally forcible and magnetic literary gift. Their subject-matter and method, to a great degree, have come of an ardent boyish discipleship to two modern schools of drama,—the bacterio-

* "A Game at Love and Other Plays" (Brentano's).